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Testimony on Governor's Bill No. 36: AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO
IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

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Submitted by: Stephen Karp, MSW

The National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter, representing over 3000 social workers throughout Connecticut, supports the bill proposed by the governor titled AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE.

APRNs offer cost effective and quality health care services to the residents of our state. Of particular interest to NASW/CT is the access and delivery of mental health services. We estimate that two-thirds of all mental health services in Connecticut are provided by clinical social workers. These social workers provide services both within agency practice and private practice. In both settings we see an important role for the APRN that includes medication management. This bill will provide APRNs with the ability to practice fully independently and as such will increase the providers our members can consult with and collaborate with when the social worker's client is on a psychotropic medication.

There is a lack of sufficient psychiatrists and especially child and adolescent psychiatrists within Connecticut. This has made it difficult for individuals to access needed mental health services when medication management is necessary. Likewise, social service agencies often find it difficult to attain sufficient hours of consultation with a psychiatrist for their clients who are in need of medication management. This bill will significantly increase the accessibility of qualified providers who can provide consultation, oversight and direct care of individuals in need of mental health and physical health care.

Just as clinical social workers frequently work in collaboration with a psychiatrist seeking consultation when the social worker deems it necessary, we can expect that an APRN will do the same when appropriate. One of the common arguments against APRN's in independent practice is that they may not be properly educated or able to handle certain health issues that may be inflicting their patients. However, there are many general practitioners as well as social workers as noted above that initially see patients with problems that are outside their scope of trainings and these doctors/social workers refer their patients to a specialist who can properly treat the individual. This is exactly what APRNs would do. As professionals APRNs can be counted on to seek consultation when they need additional assistance however they should not be required to practice under physician consultation when not all cases need this added level of scrutiny. This bill recognizes the ability of an APRN to practice independently and by doing so will expand access to health care in a cost effective manner. APRN's are not trying to take patients away from doctors but rather to provide more options to patients.

Our members who work with APRNs consistently report on the positive relationship they have and on the quality of services the APRN provides. This feedback from our members was an important factor in NASW/CT offering our support for the Governor's Bill No. 36 .

APRNs must complete a rigorous training regimen to earn the APRN. At a time when the Affordable Care Act is looking to expand healthcare access and services our state needs to be looking at how to assure that we have an adequate number of providers to offer that care. By removing the requirement that an APRN practice under a formal collaboration agreement with a physician is a sensible step toward expansion of health care services. It is also recognition of the qualifications of APRNs and the changing health care landscape that demands better ways of providing care.

In conclusion, the State Innovation Model (SIM) introduced recently promotes equal access to healthcare for everyone. Additionally, the Advanced Medical Homes that is the foundation of this initiative is designed to provide better access to primary care and to increase health care coordination. But I would ask you to consider the already long waits and high costs that often inhibit patients from scheduling regular visits with a primary care physician. Now within the state and in the country we are in uncharted territory as we implement the Affordable Care Act which provides health care access to millions of people who were once without it. How are we going to manage this influx of newly insured? One part of the solution needs to be allowing APRN's to take on more responsibility within their community thereby alleviating pressure on primary care physicians and most importantly providing patients with better access to quality care. NASW/CT believes by passing this bill and giving APRN's the chance to work freely within communities throughout Connecticut you will be addressing the growing need for qualified primary care providers.